

The Commission on Sustainable Development: Focusing on Implementation

Overview

With its concerted focus on implementation, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg marked a turning point for UN efforts on sustainable development. Governments, civil society, and international organizations will need to adapt to this new focus. We will all need to modify how we do our business.

One of the organizations that will need to adapt is the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). In the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI), governments called for some specific reforms for the CSD, including:

- “Limiting negotiations in the sessions of the Commission to every two years.” (147d)
- “Limit[ing] the number of themes addressed at each session.” (147e)
- “Serv[ing] as a focal point for the discussion of partnerships that promote sustainable development, including sharing lessons learned, progress made and best practices.” (148b)

With these reforms, the CSD could evolve into a truly innovative forum that engages the full sustainable development community in an effective dialogue on implementation. As the UN, its member states, other international organizations, and major groups consider how to focus on implementation, the initial thoughts outlined below are intended to promote further dialogue.

Key Issues

1. Using the six weeks to foster implementation

- The CSD has a budget for 6 weeks of meetings annually. The CSD should consider how best to use this time to catalyze the exchange of the information and resources – technical and financial – required to implement sustainable development activities. In doing so, the CSD should be structured to attract practitioners and policymakers with practical experience.
- An implementation-focused CSD will require new meeting formats to best engage the full sustainable development community. Thought should be given to new structures for facilitated dialogues, new meeting schedules (*e.g.*, in addition to week-long sessions, the CSD could consider organizing 2-3 day conferences and roundtable discussions and 1-day events for informal consultations), and the use of new technologies such as videoconferencing.

2. Facilitating partnerships and reporting on their progress

- Partnerships offer an exciting new focus for implementation of sustainable development. Space should be made for discussions of ongoing and completed partnership initiatives, forging of new partnerships, macro-level discussions of lessons learned, expert-to-expert training, and networking of experts.

- Every year, the CSD should devote time to allow partnerships to report on their progress to date. It is essential that there be transparency and the opportunity for partnerships to demonstrate their progress and receive comments on their activities.
- Partnership representatives should interact directly with government and civil society representatives, answering questions and discussing outcomes in a public and transparent manner. Additionally, reports from the partnerships should be placed on the UN website.
- Other potential elements of CSD sessions include: facilitated dialogues and roundtables, discussions of capacity building (including parallel expert-to-expert training courses), side events, and exhibitions and public discussion of success stories and lessons learned.

3. Focused discussion of complex sectoral issues

- For the CSD to be most effective, it could prove useful to focus the scope of each session. Previous attempts to consider several sectoral issues simultaneously (e.g. CSD9's agenda of energy, transportation, atmosphere, information for decision-making and participation, and international cooperation for an enabling environment) have produced mixed results.
- Each issue must be considered in the broad context of sustainable development, including the critical issue of how sustainable development contributes to poverty eradication. Additionally, the JPOI highlights the need for the CSD to "focus on the cross-sectoral aspects of specific sectoral issues" (147b). A discussion on water, for example, must consider all three pillars of sustainable development, as well as the relationship between water and other sectoral issues.
- One potential organizing principle for future sessions could be the "WEHAB" (Water, Energy, Health Agriculture, and Biodiversity) agenda put forth by Secretary General Annan before the WSSD. Applied to the JPOI-mandated structure of negotiations every other year, this approach might break out as follows:

2003: Organizational	
2004: Partnerships	Water, poverty eradication, and sustainable development
2005: Partnerships + Negotiation	
2006: Partnerships	Energy, poverty eradication, and sustainable development
2007: Partnerships + Negotiation	
2008: Partnerships	Health, poverty eradication, and sustainable development
2009: Partnerships + Negotiation	
2010: Partnerships	Agriculture, poverty eradication, and sustainable development
2011: Partnerships + Negotiation	
2012: Partnerships	Biodiversity, poverty eradication, and sustainable development
2013: Partnerships + Negotiation	

- Within this framework, a component of each CSD session should be devoted to a more general discussion of partnerships in all sectors.

4. CSD participation

Governments

- Governments and other partners should be encouraged to send substantive experts to the CSD; these experts should be knowledgeable in the particular areas under consideration and in the implementation of partnership projects in those areas. Care should be taken to

foster participation from ministries representing all three pillars of sustainable development.

Major Groups

- While the CSD has led the way within the United Nations for public participation and civil society engagement, this new focus on implementation will require an even greater effort to involve major groups. Dialogues on partnerships must allow major groups the opportunity to interact directly with partnership representatives in a public and transparent manner.
- Reviews of multi-stakeholder dialogues at the CSD have been mixed. Recent attempts in Bali and Johannesburg to facilitate these dialogues and make them more dynamic are commendable. Lessons learned from these experiences, as well as previous CSD sessions and other international gatherings, should be considered in designing multi-stakeholder dialogues at future CSD meetings.
- The Secretariat could facilitate our thinking on this issue by providing alternative models for future stakeholder participation.
- Per the JPOI, national, regional, and international scientific networks should be encouraged to become more involved in the work of the CSD (149c), as should educators (149d).

5. Complementing the International Calendar

- Last year's discussions on international environmental governance stressed the unmanageable pressures caused by the overcrowding of the international calendar. To build on its facilitative role to promote implementation of sustainable development, the CSD could plan its meeting schedule to complement – rather than duplicate – other key events on the international calendar.
- For example, in the water sector, the World Water Forum meets every three years. The CSD could help focus international efforts on water issues in the intervening years by devoting some of its meeting time to discussion of water partnerships that help implement both the JPOI and WWF outcomes. The shorter events convened by the CSD in the WSSD preparatory process proved useful in facilitating interim coordination between PrepComs and between processes taking place in multiple UN fora (*e.g.*, IEG and WSSD).

6. Website Technology

- Information on partnerships and best practices should be readily available to sustainable development practitioners and policymakers. The JPOI calls on the CSD to “undertake further measures to promote best practices and lessons learned, . . . including the broader use of information technologies”(150). One tool at the CSD’s disposal is its Internet site, which should be redesigned, taking into account lessons learned from the existing WSSD site as well as other efforts such as the UNDP/BASD Virtual Exhibit. Consideration should be given to how best to make this information available to those without Internet access.